

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 876

IE 007 691

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TITLE Schools, Groups and Networks: A Political Perspective. Revised Version.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
School Capacity for Problem Solving Group. Network Development Div.
PUB DATE Mar 77
NOTE 63p.; Paper prepared for the Network Development Staff, School Capacity for Problem Solving Group, National Institute of Education (Washington, DC, March 16-17, 1977); For related documents, see IR 007 659, IR 007 663-666, IR 007 671, and IR 007 689

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bibliographies; Diffusion; Educational Innovation; *Government Role; Group Dynamics; *Intervention; *Networks; *Political Issues; Schools; Social Relations
IDENTIFIERS *Group Theory; *Social Network

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Network theory has recently been suggested as providing a useful framework for developing a change strategy by which the federal government can induce educational reform. In this paper the potential contributions of network theory are assessed by showing its close relationship to group theory. Then three critiques of group theory and practice--from within the group tradition itself, from a structural perspective, and from the viewpoint of utilitarian individualism--are shown to be applicable to network theory. The power of these critiques is illustrated by a review of the experiences of the community action program of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, and the implications for school-related interventions are stated. (Author)

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SCHOOLS, GROUPS AND NETWORKS: A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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IR0007691

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ABSTRACT

Network theory has recently been suggested as providing a useful framework for developing a change strategy by which the federal government can induce educational reform. The potential contributions of network theory are best assessed by showing its close relationship to group theory. Once this is done, I show the applicability to network theory of three critiques of group theory and practice: critiques 1) from within the group tradition itself; 2) from a structural perspective; and 3) from the viewpoint of utilitarian individualism. The power of these critiques is exemplified by the experiences of the community action program. The implications for school-related interventions are stated.

SCHOOLS, GROUPS AND NETWORKS: A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE*

Society is composed of social networks. Ego interacts with others, who interact with third parties, and so on. The term denotes a series of possible flows of interaction, which may be more or less close-knit, and differentially activated over time (Bott 1957). The most common graphic representation of a network, therefore, is "a series of points, some of which are joined by lines. The points of the image are people, or sometimes groups, and the lines indicate which people interact with each other (Barnes 1954, p.43)".

Information, affection, influence, and money can all be transmitted across the networks formed by these interactions. Through these interactions ego acquires his own self-consciousness, his very understanding of himself in relation to society. And by means of these networks of interactions the structure of society is formed and changes its form. Consequently, social scientists have discovered networks

*This paper was commissioned from the author by the School Capacity for Problem Solving Group in the National Institute of Education, as part of the Group's continuing research program on the role of social networks in educational change. The opinions expressed in the paper do not necessarily reflect the position of the Institute. Clay Martin assisted in the preparation of this paper.

wherever they have searched for them - in tribes, organizations, and local communities; among delinquents, doctors, and Congressmen; amid agencies, voluntary associations, and nation-states (Mitchell 1969; Fortes 1945; Payne and Pheyssey 1973; Levine et al 1963; Coleman et al 1966; Kadushin 1976; Fararo and Sunshine 1964; Schon 1971; Perrucci and Pilisuk 1970; Deutsch 1953). And because these interactions are empirically verifiable behaviors, they can be measured and analyzed with great precision and sophistication (Kadushin 1968; Laumann 1973). Finally, networks continuously change; as they change ego changes, and society changes. Those who wish to change ego can therefore induce changes in his network (Speck and Reuveni 1969; Speck et al.1972). And if one wishes to change society in certain ways, one can "network", i.e., engage in the structuring of new patters of interaction (Kadushin 1969; Sarason 1977). Recently, school reformers, including a number of governmental agencies, have discovered "networking" as still another strategy for realizing desired social and educational change.

Society as a network is only one way of characterizing social life. Alternatively, one can conceptualize society as a system, an aggregation of individuals, a hierarchy of classes, an interlocking set of organizations, a composite of social roles, a cluster of shared cultural norms, or, most relevantly, a host of social groups. Whichever of

these units one takes as fundamental is not an arbitrary act to be taken at one's convenience. Whether or not a specific analyst understands the significance of his choice, his selected unit of analysis embeds him in a distinctive philosophical tradition with its own epistemology and ontology. For example, the economist who takes individual consumer preferences as sovereign and defines Pareto-optimal outcomes as societal equilibria commits himself to a liberal utilitarian understanding of society ultimately rooted in social contract theory. From another vantage point, the Marxist who understands society as a hierarchical class structure characterized by domination and exploitation sees reality shaped by historical forces beyond the control of individuals and institutions.

If society is understood as a web of networks, at least by implication the fundamental units of analysis that have been chosen are the interactions between individuals. In this regard, it is significant that network theory has been developed most assiduously in just those branches of American social sciences - sociology, anthropology, and social psychology - which were most influenced by Max Weber (1947), who took social actions to be the fundamental units of society. The popularity of Weber's conceptualization in American social science, moreover, can be traced to the

initial flowering of these and related social science disciplines amid the overlapping influences of late Nineteenth Century philosophical pragmatism and political Progressivism, a milieu in which the activities of groups could easily be taken as the essence of social reality (Karl 1974).

To understand the significance and implications of social networks, one must appreciate how closely this concept in contemporary writing approximates the social group, as understood by Dewey, Bentley, Mead, and the progressive/pluralist tradition more generally. Network theorists, to be sure, have not simply reinvented the wheel. Conceptualizing society as a network allows for the examination of internal relations within groups, better delineation of the exact relation of group members to one another, and more precise specification of the relationships among groups. Previously, only a primitive theory of oligarchy guided studies of the internal structure of groups; and only the rather crude notion of cross-pressure informed research on questions of inter-group relations. Network concepts represent decisive advances in both areas. On the other hand, the overlap between the two approaches is large, and group theory has a richer historical tradition, has articulated its theoretical premises more fully, and has received

far more sustained critical commentary. Assessing network theory can thus be best approached through an evaluation of the strengths and limitations of group theory.

Once I have clarified how extensively group and network theory overlap, I shall clarify the potential contributions and limitations of network theory through an examination of the most important critiques of group theory. First, I shall review criticisms of the theory and practice of political groups from within the group tradition, then from a structural perspective, and, thirdly, from the viewpoint of utilitarian individualism. I shall then look at the community action program as a concerted governmental effort to respond to these critiques of group practice in the United States. Finally, I shall draw out the implications for governmental intervention in school-related networks.

Parallels between Group and Network Theory

Interactions. Both network and group theory take interactions among individuals as the sociologically significant data. Networks consist of nodal points connected by lines. The point represent individuals (or sometimes, other units such as organization); the lines symbolize patterned flow that is the result of their interaction (Barnes 1972). Similarly, groups consists of regularized interactions

among two or more individuals (Bentley 1908; Truman 1971). By focusing on interaction, the analyst can generate empirically verifiable data with a good deal of precision. But it leaves out of at least direct investigation the realm of beliefs, convictions, norms, ideologies, and the like (Bentley 1908; Truman 1971; Greenstone 1975). For Bentley, the most rigorous of the group theorists, this was simply ignoring "spook stuff," constructs made from thin air that had no independent explanatory power (Bentley 1908). He explained a set of interactions by prior interactions. Groups came into being as a result of the activities of prior groups, not because of individual purposes, hopes or desires. Mead's treatment of the issue was more subtle. Although he conceded the existence of individual consciousness, he argued that ego's very sense of self was conditioned by the social processes in which ego was embedded (Mead 1934).

Interests. Given their emphasis on interactions, network and group theorists circumscribe the independent standing of interests. The network theorist looks at communication, resource exchange, and transmission of goods and information across nodal points (Kadushin 1966, p.791; Barnes 1972, p.16). Through these interactions the interests of network members reveal themselves. Similarly, group theorists understand that group interests are revealed in the

course of interactions with other groups. The direction taken by the group indicates its interests and purposes (Bentley 1908; Truman 1971; Dahl 1961). It would be a hopeless mistake to explain these movements in light of member interests; that only obscures the manner by which group interactions are determined by prior group processes. However, even Bentley (1908) and, more clearly, Truman (1971), admit attitudes and opinions to the realm of scientific investigation, provided that they are understood as "tendencies to act" in certain directions, or as potential groups coming into being. With the techniques of survey research, one can anticipate the way in which groups will form by questioning individuals as to their opinions or attitudes. Both Bentley and Truman nonetheless sternly reject any suggestion that individuals or groups have interests or needs apart from their own propensity to act in certain ways. Latent interests, false consciousness or inherent needs are beyond empirical observation. They are admitted neither to the study of groups or of networks.

Change. Social life is constantly changing. Any individual network is continuously altered as friends and acquaintances develop new interests, migrate, find new employment, or die (Aronson 1970). As traditional societies modernize, network patterns increasingly cut

across village and kinship ties (Srinivas and Beteille 1964). When particular networks prove useful, they rapidly expand in size and shape (Sarason et al 1977). Indeed, malleability is a net's most distinctive quality. Similarly, group theorists see society as a sequence of processes. Multitudes of groups are constantly forming, interacting, conflicting, modifying, adjusting. Since groups are known by their activities, and since group interests reveal themselves by the direction these activities take, social life is nothing but a buzzing, humming sequence of activities, constantly changing and modifying themselves.

Mediators. From both network and group perspectives, interstitial structures link the individual to the larger society. On the one side, the group or the network connects the individual to society. On the other side, groups and nets protect the individual from the state, the bureaucracy, the mass media and other large-scale impersonal institutions. Networks provide help in crises, as, for example, when psychiatric care or abortions are needed (Kadushin 1969; Lee 1969). Networks provide social cohesion in otherwise massified metropolitan living (Gans 1962; Granovetter 1973; Laumann and Pappi 1973; Laumann 1973). They provide informal channels of communication that can be trusted in a society where advertising and promotionalism mislead and distort

(Katz and Lazerfeld 1955). Networks also serve as transmission belts through which individuals can communicate their desires to higher levels of power and influence (Perrucci and Pilisuk 1970). The group also has been treated as a mediating entity. The work group protects the individual from the impersonality of the factory (Kornblum 1975). Gang life in urban immigrant neighborhoods help to organize and order potentially hostile and violent interpersonal relations (Whyte 1961; Suttles 1968). Informal groups formed around such elemental entities as drinking fountains and lavatories counter the rigidity and repetitiveness of large-scale bureaucracies (Downs 1967). Groups are the means by which pressures for political change are mobilized, and groups limit the capacity of demagogic elites to activate alienated masses on behalf of illiberal causes (Kornhauser 1959).

Individual autonomy. In treating interaction as the basic unit of analysis, both network and group theorists tend to subordinate the individual to the social process. Individual hopes, desires, needs and interests are a function of individual participation in social activities. Although most group and network theorists have not directly addressed this issue, Mead (1934) suggests that the autonomy of the individual is to be found in the intersection of the multiplicity of group relations in which he is embedded.

Although consciousness is the product of social interactions, their great variety provides each individual with his own unique set. And because the groups with which he interacts constantly change and can be changed, the individual finds freedom - or at least the sense of freedom - while participating in the social process.

Societal equilibrium. At the same time, the multitude and variety of network and/or group processes leave society in a moving equilibrium (Truman 1971; Easton 1953; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). The constant movement means that as one set of networks bias social life in one direction, countervailing networks and/or groups will form. Because nets and groups are so malleable, society responds to emerging social problems, is open to new forces, and, as a result, makes continual progress. In such a society, the justification for innovations is their workability, i.e., their acceptance by society. And if this pragmatism implies that what exists approximates what is desirable or at least contains within it an openness to the desideratum, placing such confidence in a moving societal consensus at least avoids either utter conventionalism or personalized ethical conceits (Dewey 1954).

Subordinate classifications. Alike in their basic categories, network and group theories can also be expected to have similarities in whatever subordinate classifications may be derived. For example, strongly and weakly tied networks have been distinguished (Granovetter 1973). An extreme version of the former exists when there are direct interactions among all of the points in the nets, thus linking all parties both directly and in a multiplicity of indirect ties. Weakly tied nets have more linear relationships, the most extreme being instances where a is connected to b, who is connected to c, connected d, etc. Strongly tied nets provide great social cohesion and stability; weakly tied nets permit more efficient mechanisms for gathering and distributing information (Granovetter 1973). The counterpart in group theory, of course, is the distinction between primary groups and secondary associations (Truman 1971, pp.17-18, 35-36). Families, clans, intense friendship cliques all provide stable social support; secondary associations provide access to the larger society and influence over its policies. Network analysts have also distinguished between constituted and emergent nets, the former self-consciously constructed, the latter unplanned products of social processes (Kadushin 1976). The parallel distinction in group theory is between formal organizations and informal associations. The distinction between central and peripheral members of a network has also proven useful.

Central figures provide leadership and solidity to the net; peripheral figures introduce innovations from external sources and linkages to other net densities (Sarason et al 1977). Cross-pressure theories in the group literature make similar distinctions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954; Campbell 1960; Key 1964; Dahl 1961). It is the multiple-group member who may be marginal to both groups but a vital, interstitial figure that can link them together or soften potential antagonisms.

Implications. Network and group constructs have many of the same implications. Both suggest that the analyst focus on informal processes, not formal structures of the society. Although networks can be either constituted or emergent, the emergent networks that link members of divergent social segments have attracted greatest interest (Kadushin 1976). Networks are said to have greater impact on employment selection than do families - even in more traditional societies (Barnes 1954). Adolescents are influenced in their decisions more by their peer nets, informal as they are, than they are by family expectations. Informal networks are the preferred means for obtaining reliable information, both in making political decisions and securing clinical help (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954; Lee 1969). Formal bureaucratic channels, mass media advertising, and formally

structured channels of professional communication are much less efficacious. Group theorists have also stressed the informal processes of the society. To understand politics, one must attend to the actions of pressure groups and political parties, not official decisions and government pronouncements (Truman 1971 p.12-13; Key 1964). To understand organizations, one analyses informal group exchanges, not formal authority charts (Selznick 1966). To understand community power, one examines group involvement in decision-making processes, not the allocation of government responsibilities among office-holders (Dahl 1961; Banfield 1961). To comprehend school systems, one looks at internal and external group influences, not state regulations and school board policies (Gittel 1967; Jennings and Ziegler 1974).

Network and group theories also imply that access, communication and information are critically important variables. For network analysts, the critical questions involve the way points are connected, the kind of material that is transmitted from one point to the next, and the clarity with which the transmission occurs (Haggett 1965; Haggett and Harley 1969; Meyer 1975). Change occurs when new information is passed through networks or when the communication path is altered. In Truman's (1971, pp.264-270) study of the governmental process, he, too, emphasized the critical significance of group access. Information is power,

and the capability of communicating to those in positions of responsibility is almost the very definition of influence. Access and communication become critical because the internal characteristics of the individual decision-maker (the points in the network) are not given central importance. Their ideologies, commitments, beliefs and orientations, if important at all, are secondary in significance to the processes of interaction.

Finally, both network and group theories of society imply reformist programmatic orientations. Dewey (1954) could write of "The Public and its Problems," because he believed that a societal consensus on what was "problematic" actually or at least potentially existed. And governmental agencies encouraging "networking" consider school "problem-solving" as actually, or at least potentially, realizable within existing societal frameworks (National Institute of Education 1975). Undergirding this reformist orientation is a pragmatist understanding of society as an open, responsive, progressive system, whose component parts are so multiple, flexible, and adaptive that the system itself can learn from its mistakes and develop solutions to remaining problems.

The State and the Group: An Internal Critique

In the most rigorous formulations of group theory, the state is scarcely distinguished from the private sector of society. Government is a congerie of official groups, and interactions between official groups and private voluntary associations are necessary and continuous (Truman 1971, pp.49-52; Dahl 1961). For example, Dewey's definition of the state, or, in his words, the public, is so all embracing as to almost include all of society: he says that the public includes those who must bear the consequences of transactions to which they are not party (Dewey 1954, p.27). Since few transactions fail to have secondary and tertiary consequences, virtually all transactions have a partially public character.

This understanding of the relationship between state and private sectors was part of the pragmatist and Progressive response to the competing doctrines of individualism and collectivism (Dewey 1954, Ch.3). On the one side, liberal utilitarians insisted that liberty could best be preserved if state action was limited to exercise of those police powers necessary for preservation of property. Where property was secure, individuals pursuing their own interests would be led by an invisible hand to secure the common welfare. On the other side, socialists argued that state intervention on behalf of the masses of the people was necessary to keep

powerful interests from dispoiling the nation's wealth. Collective needs had to be protected by the majority through state action. Pragmatists struggling to establish a middle ground reconceptualized the problem by defining the state itself as but another arena within which group interactions took place.

In recent years writers accepting much of the group theory framework have nonetheless taken more seriously Weber's (1958) observation that only the state "had a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence." Given its distinctively coercive powers, the state's relationship to other groups and organizations required special scrutiny. In particular, the close interpenetration of the state and many private associations (applauded by many of the earlier group theorists) abused fundamental principles of liberty and equality in four ways: 1) state power served special interests at the expense of more general, public interests; 2) state power served oligarchical control within groups; 3) state power helped existing groups prevent the rise of new groups; and 4) the state, in ceding power to groups, gave the most influence to advantaged, organized sectors of society. These criticisms deserve elaboration.

Special interests. Close interaction between groups and government gives special advantage both to producer as

compared to consumer interests and to narrowly defined as compared to broadly defined interests (McConnell 1966, pp.336-352). Groups representing societal members in their occupational roles find it easier to organize than groups representing people in their other capacities. Farm groups have more authority in Department of Agriculture deliberations than do housewives, even though their interests are in conflict and the latter are more numerous (McConnell 1953). The same can be said for truckers, as compared to homeowners, in the formation of highway policy; lenders, as compared to debtors, in housing policy. Where groups have access, it also seems that narrow interests predominate. The National Association of Manufacturers or the Chamber of Commerce represent the broad interests of the business community at large. But the groups that have the greatest impact on government policy are those specialized trade associations which work out special standing for themselves vis-a-vis government bureaus, regulatory agencies, and Congressional committees (McConnell 1966, pp.292-3). Union power is most evident and most pernicious not in the broad-gauge demands of the AFL-CIO before Congress and to the President, but in the specific advantages won by individual unions on behalf of highly specialized craftsmen on such matters as municipal building codes and state laws regulating recruitment into the trade (McConnell, pp.334-34; Greenstone 1969).

Oligarchy. When government and groups associate too closely together, the authority of government helps sustain in office self-perpetuating oligarchies (McConnell 1966, Ch.5; Michels 1959; Lipset, Trow and Coleman 1956). In almost all organizations, only a few members attend meetings, participate in elections, and inform themselves of organizational affairs. Without much fear of retribution, a small leadership clique can therefore determine group policy. The power of a small leadership clique is further enhanced by its control over the communications network of the organization, access to member names and addresses, its prestige as a long-standing servant of group interests, and its well-developed speaking and organizing talents. Group interactions with government only reinforce oligarchical dominance within the group. Whenever group actions are colored with state authority, as when the group gains licensing powers, regulatory authority, or even formal advisory powers, the leadership acquires the prestige and perquisites of the state. Any possibility of internal group changes are further reduced.

Stability. Government-group interactions stabilize social relationships, reducing the continuous social flow necessary for innovation, adaptation and movement in the society at large (Lowi 1969, pp.85-970. First, when a group acquires the normative and coercive powers of

government, the group can use that power to control internal group dissent. Wildcat strikes by union dissidents can be firmly subdued by threatening the denial of union privileges. When new community organizations advocate changes in schools, PTA presidents, backed by the resources of the school system, can denounce the new organization as unrepresentative (Köerner 1968). When teachers find new centers for communication and discussion, a teachers' union, if threatened, can through its negotiations complicate center access to school space. Secondly, existing groups strive to control competition. Entrance into medical, legal and educational professions is carefully monitored by relevant professional associations so as to maintain favourable demand-supply relations in the labor market (Conant 1963; Hyde et al, 1954). Trade associations seek regulations controlling the formation of new firms that might compete "unfairly" (Lowi 1969, pp.117-18, 151). School teachers, superintendents and school boards unite in opposition to "free schools," "parochial schools" and tuition voucher plans, because they compete for an increasingly scarce supply of school children. In all cases, the drive is for the stabilization of social interactions, and government authority is used to impede the processes of social change, the ingredient vital for maintaining a moving equilibrium.

Social bias. When groups interact with government, they reinforce and perpetuate inequalities in society (Schattschneider 1960). Because the wealthier, better-educated, high prestige, and politically more resourceful members of society are more active in social and political organizations, the responsiveness of government to group demands recreates in the political sphere the socioeconomic inequalities in the society. Poor people and minorities do not typically organize themselves, and when they do their organizations have a short half-life. Political arrangements that give groups a predominant role in the formation of policy under-represent those segments of society most in need of government assistance.

These criticisms of group-state relations are offered by theorists who themselves accept the group basis of society. What they fear is excessive governmental interference in that group life. Instead, they propose that government officials keep groups at a distance, listening only to their petitions and demands in the course of campaigning for office and forming legislation. Once policy has been determined, its meaning should be precise and its administration and interpretation should be circumspectly managed by neutral civil servants responsive to elected leaders (Lowi 1969, Ch.10). To do otherwise is to bias group interactions with the coercive power of state authority, inappropriately stabilizing power relations in an ever-changing society.

Social Structure and Group Processes

Criticisms of structural theorists are more far-reaching. They perceive rigid patterns of domination and subjection in contemporary societies. Whether these are conditioned solely by the means of production or by a multiplicity of hierarchies, structured relations among competing segments of the population are said to constrain social life within well-defined patterns. Not only do group theories exaggerate the variety, equality and randomness of group activities, but they ignore the way in which specific group efforts are conditioned by the group's place in the structure of society.

The thrust of this critique is perhaps best exemplified by its treatment of the classic application of group theory to local politics: Robert Dahl's (1961) study of New Haven entitled Who Governs? In his analysis of the city's decision-making, Dahl argued that political resources - money, votes, organizational skills, prestige, and time - were widely, if unevenly, dispersed. Moreover, the willingness to mobilize these resources for political action varied with the intensity of citizen preferences. Dahl further argued that almost any group, seeking to participate in decision-making, could win access to political leaders, because the latter, concerned about re-election, catered to almost any

politically active minority. In Dahl's study all the elements of group theory - focus on interaction, equation of interests and activity, continuous change, groups as mediators, and societal equilibrium - are brilliantly combined to characterize a political system as open, responsive, adaptive, and progressive.

Activities. Dahl's structural critics question each of these components of his characterization. First of all, important to New Haven politics were not just the activities that took place, but also those events that never occurred (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Crenson 1971; MacFarland 1969). If one can understand power in part by looking at those who make decisions, a full appreciation of power relations must consider how it is that some decisions are never made. Some problems become issues; others do not. Why? Some items appear on the civic agenda again and again, insistently compelling a decision from political leaders; other items are never actively considered by a civic elite. Why? Is it because a segment of a city's social structure is able to keep matters affecting their vital interests from becoming issues for public discussion? It is because the institutional arrangements of our polity facilitate articulation of certain demands, but hinders others? Is it because a value consensus in the society is manipulated and sustained by controllers of the mass media and educational systems? In other words, are there not structural constraints on group activities which

shape those activities, holding them within fixed boundaries? And if this is so, then focus on activity as the fundamental unit of social life is misleading, if not sophistic.

Interests. Secondly, the equation of interests with activity makes the entirely unwarranted assumption that all members of society know and actively pursue their own interests (Balbus 1971; Dahrendorf 1959, Ch.5). But we certainly do not accept such propositions in ordinary life. We are willing to advise others as to their interests, and we often recognize the times when others are acting contrary to them. If in interpersonal relations we are capable of observing such behaviors, a characterization of society that ignores such elemental facts is at best incomplete. At a societal level, we are also aware of historical moments when groups seem to become aware of their interests. Blacks demand civil rights long denied them; women attack occupational and legal inequalities they once accepted as a matter of course; and the handicapped insist that they can no longer be treated as subhuman. In all cases, interests once latent have become manifest (Greenstone and Peterson 1973, Ch.2-3). Interests that had long lain dormant are acted upon. In equating interests with activities, group theorists not only ignore the import of these socially significant events but, more importantly, provide ideological justification for

complacency with existing societal arrangements. By equating interest with activities, they suggest that unless dissatisfaction are openly articulated, societal members are contented. No better ideology justifying a repressive society could be formulated (Marcuse 1964).

Change. Thirdly, Dahl misrepresents the malleability of the political process. He reports that new groups constantly emerged, new participants entered the game with each change in the political issue, and new coalitions cut across prior cleavages. But these changes did not provide anything close to roughly equivalent access to power on the part of all segments of the social structure (Lipsky 1970). Minorities and the poor were continuously under-represented, if their presence in the political process counted at all. And business, social, and cultural elites had great influence over the most critical decisions. Especially in the area of urban renewal, which so dramatically changed the shape of New Haven's landscape, the influence of the downtown businessmen permeated allocational decisions. Although the particular individuals participating in decision-making changed from issue to issue, the patterns of participation were still strongly influenced by the stratification system of the city. Certain socio-economic constants, including continuous and dramatic gaps between economic elites and the poor, between the socially prominent and racial minorities, changed hardly at all.

Mediator. Fourth, Dahl identifies the group as the mediator between the individual and society. In each of the issue areas he investigated - party nominations, education, urban renewal - Dahl identified a group of sub-leaders who apparently were recruited from the public at large and whose voice was given particular attention by elites. But Dahl never demonstrated that the subleaders adequately represented all segments of the community or were in communication with them (Anton 1963). And he never showed whether the subleaders exercised much influence over political decisions. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the subleaders over-represented middle and upper-middle class segments of the city, and Dahl himself admits that the consultations between these subleaders and decision-makers were largely a "democratic ritual" designed to give the appearance, not the reality, of citizen involvement. Moreover, when specific efforts have been made to involve low-income and minority groups in decision-making, the outcome, most generally, has been just another re-enactment of the "democratic ritual (Greenstone and Peterson 1973; Peterson 1976; Cibulka 1973)".

Individual Autonomy. Fifth, Dahl believes that the autonomy of the individual in New Haven is preserved by the democratic "rules of the game" which provide for both majority rule and minority rights. The political process

is easily penetrated by any individual who wishes to influence decisions, because two-party competition for office in biennial elections means that politicians are constantly looking for new sources of political support. Structural theorists respond by noting the low levels of actual citizen participation in New Haven politics. Such a low level is due to the alienation, anomie, and sense of hopelessness that citizens in a mass society feel when faced with the overwhelming concatenation of political forces arrayed against them by large-scale corporations, massive public bureaucracies, a mass media controlled by an oligopoly, and centrally-managed political parties (Mills 1956).

Equilibrium. Finally, societal equilibrium is the by-product of Dahl's model. Political life consists of activities, which reveal the interests of individuals; in a continuously changing set of political processes, these activities are organized by groups in ways that transmit public concerns to decision-making centers which respond to pressures placed upon them. In such a dynamic, moving system, no serious problem will long escape serious public attention, and society will adapt itself to emergent needs and values. Structural theorists, by challenging the components of Dahl's formulation of group theory, characterize society as a relatively fixed set of social structures where patterns of domination and subjection reproduce themselves (Kariel 1961; Connolly 1969; Balbus 1971). Only peripheral elements change;

privilege and dominance remains in the hands of those who command economic capital, social prestige, and political power.

Rational Individuals and Collective Lords

Within the group theory tradition, groups form automatically. As soon as interactional processes attain a minimal degree of regularity, group formation has begun. It is through these interactions that interests are defined and the individual's sense of himself emerges. But from a perspective which takes individuals as fundamental units of social life, the processes of group formation are highly problematic. Instead of forming willy-nilly, groups come into being only when individuals decide that their net utilities will increase as a result of joining a group (Olson 1971). And when the group provides collective goods which cannot be distributed conditional upon individual contributions, rational individuals will often see no way in which their net utilities can be increased through a group donation. The problem is most apparent in political life, where many goods have a "collective" quality to them, but the difficulty arises in many other contexts as well.

Collective Goods. For purposes of this paper, a collective good may be defined as one which cannot be feasibly

excluded from members of a category once it has been provided to any single member (Samuelson 1954). For example, once a state provides schooling for children in certain age categories, it must by constitutional requirements provide that opportunity for all such children. This schooling must be provided, whether or not parents help pay for its supply. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to secure voluntary contributions for the supply of schooling opportunities; rational parents, aware that their children can receive the education whether or not they themselves help pay for it, will prefer to maximize their net utilities by encouraging their children to attend school but without contributing to its support. As a result, the state necessarily must levy compulsory taxes in order to sustain its educational system.

Many groups supply collective goods without the compulsory powers of the state at their disposal. And in these cases, groups find it very difficult to solicit successfully the voluntary contributions allowing the group to survive. In the case of small groups these difficulties are ameliorated by the noticeability of specific contributions (Olson 1971). Individuals will contribute when they can readily see their contributions matched by others, thereby insuring the supply of the collective good. An office party relying on voluntary contributions successfully collects

from throughout the office, because each can notice how their own individual contribution, matched by others, is supplying the collectively enjoyed bacchanalia. In the case of large groups, the noticeability of contributions is much less; individuals do not know whether their donations will encourage others to give, and they therefore cannot easily estimate the chances that their contributions will increase the supply of the collective good. Parents will not give much, if any, money to a PTA (even if they think well of its plans and goals), because they can see only a remote connection between their contribution and PTA success. If others contribute, their donation is not needed. If others do not contribute, their donation, unless very large, will not be enough for the group to succeed. In either case, their donation is wasted.

Almost all politically relevant voluntary associations face comparable problems. Such organizations typically supply a collective good: e.g., representation of group interests to public officials. Potential members who share the interests of the group will maximize their net utilities by letting others pay the cost of such representation while enjoying the benefits of organizational lobbying. Since all potential members will calculate similarly, the group does not come into being - unless it acquires the compulsory powers of the state or develops a stock of selective incentives or inducements.

Many so-called voluntary associations in fact have compulsory powers. Many unions can compel contributions through union-shop or closed-shop agreements with companies that have the force of law. Many professional associations, including medical societies and bar associations, exercise powers of the state as they regulate entrance into and performance in the profession. Local units of the largest farmers' organization, the Farm Bureau, served as outposts for the government-funded extension service. Still larger numbers of, if not all, voluntary associations use selective incentives - material, solidary or purposive - to sustain their membership (Wilson 1973). Indeed, these incentives are so important for sustaining group life that a full statement of their characteristics is appropriate.

Selective Incentives. Material, solidary and purposive incentives link organizations to the three systems of stratification in modern, industrial societies which Weber analytically distinguished (Peterson 1975). Material incentives are things which have market value, things which, in Weber's terms, improve one's class or market position. Because in modern societies, marketable products are so highly valued, these material incentives efficiently induce contributions to voluntary associations. Patronage promised to campaign workers is the prototypical example. Teacher's aide or clerical positions given to active members of parent

advisory groups are another. Siting a school building so as to raise the property values of some specific individual or small group also serves as a selective material inducement for citizen participation, one reason school site decisions generate wider public involvement than most educational policies. Sanctions or negative material incentives can also be used to reduce individual participation in an organization. If a school system dismisses or fails to promote a union activist, it can discourage a unionization drive. If a principal suspends a student boycott leader, he can hamper the political mobilization of a student body.

Although these and other material incentives powerfully shape patterns of group formation, individuals do not participate in organizations for monetary rewards alone. Solidary incentives supplied by organizations can enhance the individual's status, i.e., the honor accorded him either by other group members or by society at large. Parents may participate in PTAs, because teachers, noticing their school involvement, will give their children special classroom attention. Teachers may participate in school reform drives because their external involvements may enhance their standing within the school, perhaps even earning them a Great Teacher Award. More generally, people will join organizations because it is "fun", it is an opportunity to meet other people, and it

gives them an opportunity to talk to well-known public figures. Because all these solidary incentives are selective (i.e., they are provided only to those who contribute to the organizational cause), they can motivate individual effort on behalf of some larger, collective cause.

Finally, groups can use purposive incentives to motivate contributions. Although these incentives are in most cases less efficacious than material or solidary incentives, some individuals donate to organizations to increase their political power, i.e., to improve their position in the society's structure of power. In this case, a voluntary association must demonstrate that the individual can more efficiently influence government policy through contributions to the association than by any other possible alternative. Such an incentive works especially well at getting sustained contributions from the most active minority. These people often are particularly concerned about exercising power - either on behalf of some cause or for its own sake - and they often dedicate themselves to an organization out of a belief in its special efficacy.

As useful for soliciting contributions as all these incentives - material, solidary and purposive - have proved to be, group theory is defective in its assumption that groups - especially those providing collective goods - form

automatically. Unless the group is small, has the compulsory powers of the state, or has some combination of material, solidary or purposive incentives, it will not become active. Shared interests will not become activated but will remain in a dormant condition. Group theory wrongly equates interests with groups and groups with activities. Individuals have to see that their contributions will increase their net utilities before they contribute to group formation. Significantly, these problems are not uniform for all groups; groups with lower incomes, status, and power will find it especially difficult to become activated (for more on this, see Peterson 1975).

When Bentley wrote, groups were dynamic, emerging, changing, shaping, moving, and responding. Their multiplicity, variety and diversity were the grounds for speaking of political life as a process too ephemeral to be confined within rigid structures implied by such concepts as class, state, power structure, and the like. More recent group theorists like Truman and Dahl also understood organization as the means by which numbers could triumph over wealth and position in the struggle of power. Where political associations could freely compete in an electoral process, it was thought that those with little more than votes and feet could combine together to bargain with, if not simply defeat, the economically dominant and socially prestigious. But if

organized groups depend on the stratification systems of the society - class, status, and political - in order to provide incentives - material, solidary, and purposive - that will enlist individual contributions, it is most difficult for groups to introduce major changes in these stratification systems. As long as it was possible to theorize that groups formed automatically to express opinions intensely felt, a powerful case could be made that groups opened up the political process. But once the differential maintenance problems of groups across the social structure are taken into account, then groups must be understood not as the dynamic force in American politics, but, in Wilson's words, as a stabilizing force that provides "continuity and predictability to social processes (Wilson, 1973, p.7)."

Government Intervention to Offset the Group Bias

Certain themes have emerged repeatedly in the tripartite critique of group theory we have reviewed. Among group theorists themselves, there has been increasing recognition that too cozy a relationship between groups and the state stabilizes inequalities. Structural theorists assert more vigorously that the group process itself is conditioned by a rigid stratification system that cannot be modified except by some fundamental transformation. And incentive theory suggests that the interests of higher-ranking segments of society, who have more selective inducements at their

disposal, will be asserted most easily.

Since group theory and network theory substantially overlap, these criticisms are also applicable to networks. If networks are sponsored by the state, they may simply retard the processes of social change. If networks must operate within the confines of the larger, more rigid stratification system of the society, then they cannot fundamentally affect that structure. And if incentives must be given to individuals to induce their contributions to networks, then those with the most resources will find networking the easiest. Networking is thus not a viable social change strategy.

But, it may be asked, what happens when government deliberately commits itself to the creation of groups or networks among poorer, less prestigious segments of society? Are these interventions exceptions to the overall pattern? By reviewing the experience of the community action program of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, some answers to these questions are possible. Legislation for that program called for "maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas and members of the groups served," and local poverty councils, besides including representatives of public and private welfare agencies, government officials and established interest groups, provided representation for poor minorities. These councils had the responsibility of formulating policies for local community action agencies in cities

and counties throughout the country. Although the early architects of this organizational structure seldom if ever spoke of networking, comparable principles motivated their actions. They believed that by bringing together representatives from diverse agencies and groups to discuss common problems as they affected low-income minorities, mutual discussion and exchange would yield higher levels of co-ordination among local service-delivery systems. By including representatives of the poor on the council, improvements in co-ordination would take into account the needs of low-income minorities, as they themselves saw them. In other words, a network of communication inter-connecting both professionals and laity was expected to yield more efficient and responsive social-service bureaucracies.

Although some success was achieved, I, together with J. David Greenstone (1977), review elsewhere a literature which shows that with few exceptions the network did not create significant changes in power relations or institutional structures. The nation's involvement in Viet Nam and a corresponding evaporation of the reform impulse in American politics certainly helped limit the impact of the community action program. But at least part of CAP's difficulties stemmed from its group or networking approach. The selection of a poverty council providing a center for a network of exchange relationships among professionals and representative laity reflected a group-oriented, consensual vision of social life. The emphasis on co-ordination within the

community action program persisted simply because it was so well suited to this pragmatic, consensual tradition.

As Greenstone and I (1977) concluded,

To have achieved more substantive social-change objectives, CAAs would had to have developed a more conflict-oriented view of social relationships. Ignoring other interests, CAPs would had to have concentrated on mobilizing low-income minorities, inducing changes in the systems of service delivery to these groups, and forming a potent, organized political force wherever such minorities were concentrated in large numbers. In a very few cases, namely Newark and Oakland, community action came close to pursuing such a strategy. And according to one large comparative study, the more such a strategy was pursued, the more CAAs altered patterns of social-service delivery systems. Nevertheless, the vast majority of CAAs typically expected low-income minorities to participate along with other interests in a consensual fashion. The goal was to develop policies consistent with the interests of the entire community by hammering out compromises with other special interests - a view of politics deeply engrained in the group-oriented American

tradition. Such an approach has severe limitations. When poor minorities became just another interest group pressing its claims on CAA officials rather than the dominant goal-setting force in community action, CAPs' cutting edge was necessarily dulled. Under this multiple system of representation, money was typically parcelled out to a broad range of agencies and groups, leaving only small amounts for indigenous community organizations. Within a supposedly consensual decision-making system, a premium was placed on professional expertise, not on citizen complaints and a laity's unsophisticated polemics. As a result, this consensual, compromising style was hardly an efficient means of organizing or mobilizing a previously apathetic, socially deprived constituency. It was, in other words, most difficult to administer a service-delivery system while simultaneously engaging groups in political protest.

Implications for Intervention in School-Related Networks

The pitfalls that networks as mechanisms for socio-political change encounter have been identified throughout the paper. In conclusion, it may be more helpful to state

positively the considerations any government-sponsored intervention in school-related social networks might wish to take into account.

1. Network intervention and stimulation is most needed among those with less income, status and power. Groups with a stock of incentives necessary to form networks are least likely to occur spontaneously or naturally in these segments of society. Among educators themselves, the greatest needs for networks are among teachers, who unfortunately have the lowest status in the educational profession, and who are most isolated in their occupational practice. Geographically, the greatest needs are in poorer and more isolated areas: rural communities and minority communities within central cities. Among those external to the educational profession, the greatest needs for external intervention are among working- and lower-class groups, especially if they are of minority backgrounds. Here groups and networks are often transient and isolated.

2. Intervention should begin with pre-existing groups and networks. If taken by itself, this principle only confirms the Biblical truth: to everyone who has /it/ will be given. I therefore do not make this suggestion except in conjunction with the point previously made. However, even in poor minority communities networks can be uncovered, though they may not have an exclusive focus on the school system. Instead, they may be embedded in the institutions

that have traditionally serviced working-class clientele: unions, political parties, churches, and multi-purpose block clubs and community organizations. If one begins with these institutions, one starts with packages of organized activity where community interests have begun to express themselves. The government intervention runs less risk of creating interests where none exist.

3. Intervention should have limited objectives.

Government-sponsored interactions rarely if ever induce dramatic social changes. As we have seen, they are more likely to replicate existing patterns of super- and subordination, and they may even retard change possibilities in the society. The more grandiose the project the greater the chances of failure or even of counter-productive results. For example, networking across lay-professional divisions is likely to only provide new contexts for their reproduction, especially if the laity represents lower status groups. And within lay or professional sectors, bold experiments to build links across significant class or ethnic divisions are high-risk enterprises. More useful networking experiments might try to build systems of communication among similarly placed groups and organizations who have common concerns and few conflicting interests. By exchanging information, experiences, contacts and strategic calculations, each may gain resources. Successful spontaneous

networks have just these characteristics: associations of school boards exchanging information and strategies on bargaining with teacher unions; comparable communications centers among unions; regional and state associations of PTAs; professional associations of superintendents. There are fewer such regional, state and national associations of working-class and minority groups, because group formation is more difficult and available incentives are fewer. But presumably the value of comparable exchange opportunities are equal.

4. Intervention should build weak ties among organizations.¹ A central finding of network analysis confirms our intuitive understanding: the more alike people are in interests and preferences, the more likely they are to fashion strong ties; and, conversely, the stronger the ties connecting actors, the more similar they are in various ways. (Newcomb 1961; Brown 1965; Laumann 1968; Bramel 1969). In such relationships, the psychological demands for conformity are high. Where ties are weak, by contrast, the actors are likely to be less alike in interests and preferences, and therefore less subject to the pressures of conformity.

There are intense, frequent information flows among actors connected by strong ties. But, as Simmel (1955) understood so well, and as recent research has confirmed,

intense bridges among actors are often exclusive in character. Information flows well within the relationship's boundaries, but not across boundaries. The number of information bridges is quantitatively limited, though the quality is high. The paths among actors are positive, but paths outside the strong network are either very long and tenuous, or nonexistent.

As a consequence, networks of strong ties depend on the continuity of all the information bridges; should one be broken, the information flow would come to a halt. Where ties are more numerous yet weaker, alternative diffusion paths are always available. Thus, as Granovetter notes, "this means that whatever is to be diffused can relate a larger number of people, and traverse greater social distance . . . when passed through weak ties rather than strong." The quality of information may be higher in enclosed cliques, but its diffusion is maximized whenever extended networks of weak ties can be constructed.

5. Intervention should not substitute material for purposive and solidary incentives. Many spontaneously-formed, politically-relevant networks depend on solidary and purposive incentives for their perpetuation. People gather together because they enjoy one another's company or because they have shared purposes which through conjoint activity

they can further more effectively. The processes of exchange have an egalitarian quality, because each depends on the participation of others. At the same time, each participant feels a certain personal autonomy and self-control, because he knows that at any time exchanges no longer satisfy he can leave the network. Because solidary and purposive incentives are especially available to higher status and more politically powerful groups, these open, autonomous, internally egalitarian networks are particularly prevalent in higher reaches of the society. But they are not totally absent from lower-status groups. Especially among teachers and other lower-status professionals, networks provide valued sources of information and social support. Even among the poorest segments of the lay population, politically relevant solidary groupings can be found.

A government's characteristic mode of intervention into networks is by means of monetary incentives. Although they are vastly more efficient, they can place severe strains on prior relationships. Hierarchy and organization replace informal contacts. Participation is motivated increasingly by extrinsic rather than intrinsic rewards. Accordingly, interventionist strategies should be modest. Financial resources should be used to reduce the costs of exchange but not eliminate them altogether. Paid staff should be

kept to a minimum, so that the voluntary nature of the relationship is not transformed into a bureaucratic structure.

6. Autonomy of network should be maintained. If government intervention is modest, network autonomy will be more likely. The stronger and more directive the government intervention, the more dependent a group or network becomes on the agency sponsoring it. The more dependent it is on the agency, the more its representative capabilities are jeopardized. Its leadership core may be selected only after consulting the agency; its staff will have to be recruited for its management and accounting skills rather than its responsiveness to network concerns; in the end, the network develops every incentive to take as its primary constituency the government agency rather than the community it purports to speak for. Ironically, its very dependence on the government agency may increase its local influence vis-a-vis a school system. The greater the size of its funding, the more resources it will have and the more legitimacy it will be accorded by local school officials. With these advantages, it will have increased access to the school system and, consequently, more information to formulate policies and programs. In the short and even medium run, its resources and influence greatly reduce its survival problems. Full- and part-time staff can be recruited; volunteers can be reimbursed for expenses; special travel

opportunities and the availability of copiers and duplicating facilities may provide additional incentives for participation. In short, material perquisites help make such an organization operate almost like a small business corporation.

But before too long, the organization's very success in these terms creates problems. Staff devote ever more time to managing federal or foundation funds and developing new proposals to extend their financing. Volunteers come to expect payment for services, and those who cannot be included on the payroll feel deprived relative to others. The organization becomes known as part of the "establishment." As dependence on material incentives increases, the availability of solidary and psychic incentives evaporates. It is no longer "fun" to be part of the organization, and the leadership listens less to its constituents, leaving them with a lower sense of efficacy. Finally, the government agency, increasingly unhappy with its latest social experiment, develops new policy options and cuts back its support of the organization. Organizational survival without external support becomes highly problematic.

To counteract these tendencies in any network intervention it is preferable that some intermediary institution handle accounting, evaluation and other functions necessary

for compliance with government regulations. Any network itself should be kept as free of such obligations as possible. It may be utopian to suggest further that government officials should refrain from guiding the activities of the network and should guarantee funding over a prolonged period of time, but that is what could best achieve processes of social change that do not simply replicate patterns of dominance and control already in place.

Summary

Network theory, like group theory, is a positive theory, or, more exactly, it provides a conceptual framework for the development of a positive theory. To this extent, one only speaks of networks as nouns. But network theory also has normative or, at a minimum, strategic implications. And to the extent that these implications are developed, one can speak of networking or "to network" as a verb. In this essay, we have tried to show the way in which the positive and normative uses of the concept network are related. Viewed broadly, network theory focuses on interpersonal interactions. Processes of interaction within networks reveal member interests. The network links individuals to their social world, and it provides the dynamic force that induces continuous social changes while preserving societal equilibrium. Such an understanding of society

suggests that the way to induce desirable change is to utilize networks as mechanisms for personal and institutional modification. It is this connection between positive and normative theory that has generated critical evaluation.

Critical review that draws from the literature re-assessing group theory takes three forms: 1) Networks sponsored by or associated with the state stabilize processes of social change. The normative authority and coercive powers of the state strengthen the place of existing networks, allowing them to oppose effectively the emergence of new networks. 2) Networks are a product of the society's system of social stratification; whatever variability in membership and texture specific networks may have, the overall social network of a society only reproduces existing patterns of domination and subordination. Consequently, one cannot easily create networks that induce significant social change. 3) Networks do not form automatically, but take shape only when individuals find it in their interests to contribute to the network's maintenance. As a result, the network will not survive, unless it can develop selective incentives - material, solidary or purposive - to induce contributions. Since these incentives are least available to networks linking lower status citizens, their formation in this segment of society is most problematic.

Intervention in the social network of the society should thus be undertaken with caution. Federal resources should be used sparingly, should be concentrated on lower-status segments of society, should take advantage of existing networks, should seek to build weak ties among those with common interests, and should allow for maximum network autonomy.

Notes

1. The next three points were first stated in an unpublished research paper prepared by Ira Katznelson, Earl Durham and me. I beg the indulgence of my co-authors for including them here.

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